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ABSTRACT

In 1989, Chicago (Illinois) Public Schools began an experiment with the radical decentralization of power and authority. This book tells the story of what happened in Chicago's elementary schools in the first four years of this reform. Implicit in the reform was the theory that expanded local democratic participation would stimulate organizational change in the schools, which in turn would foster improved teaching and learning. With longitudinal case study data on 22 schools, survey responses from principals and teachers in 269 schools, and supplementary system-wide administrative data, the authors identify 4 types of school politics: (1) strong democracy; (2) consolidated principal power; (3) maintenance; and (4) adversarial. Findings suggest that in about one third of the schools, expanded local democratic participation served as a strong level for systemic changes focused on improved instruction. Case studies of six actively restructuring schools illustrate how the principal's role is recast under decentralization, and how ideas and information from external sources are brought to bear on school change initiatives. (Contains 14 tables, 42 figures, and 266 references.) (SLD)

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